

CALIFORNIA WEST NILE VIRUS (WNV) DEAD BIRD & TREE SQUIRREL SURVEILLANCE
PROGRAM

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH (CDPH) DIVISION OF
COMMUNICABLE DISEASE CONTROL

Updated March 14, 2013

Dead Bird and Tree Squirrel Reporting and Submission Instructions for Local Agencies

General Information: During dead bird testing season (mid-March to mid-October), please refer calls from the public about dead birds (especially recently dead crows, ravens, magpies, jays, or raptors) or dead tree squirrels immediately to the **CDPH WNV Dead Bird Hotline (1-877-WNV-BIRD, or 1-877-968-2473)**. The hotline is staffed Monday-Friday, 8am - 5pm. (Beginning in mid-April the hotline will be monitored 7 days a week 8am - 5pm). Reports can also be made after hours via voicemail prompts and on the WNV website: www.westnile.ca.gov.

Agencies may call the **agency phone number, 510-412-4601**, and reach the hotline to submit a bird, cancel a bird, or inform the operators about changes in pick-up schedules or species collection.

CDPH will assess the suitability of the dead bird or tree squirrel for testing and contact your agency only if the carcass is approved for pickup. Any carcasses sent without prior notification will not be tested.

Only agencies listed under the permit issued to CDPH from the California Department of Fish & Wildlife are authorized to pick up dead birds and tree squirrels. The agencies covered include local mosquito abatement districts, environmental health departments, and other designated agencies.

Public Salvage: If local agencies have informed CDPH they will accept public salvage birds from specific areas where they cannot pick up birds, hotline operators will instruct members of the public who have salvaged dead birds found on their place of residence to drop them off at their designated agency. **The public must first call the Dead Bird Hotline and obtain a Dead Bird Number**; a corresponding public salvage submission form will then be faxed to the appropriate agency. The public will be instructed by the hotline staff to double-bag the carcasses and drop them off at the agency within 24 hours, between 9 am - 3 pm, Monday – Friday. Note: only dead birds may be brought in by the public to local agencies for shipping. **We discourage public salvage of all squirrels because ground squirrels, which could be infected with plague, may be confused with tree squirrels.**

weblinks: [bird and tree squirrel ID chart \(pdf\)](#)

Shipping and Testing: Once the submission is approved, your agency can ship the carcass to the California Animal Health & Food Safety laboratory at UC Davis (CAHFS Central). CAHFS Central will then remove specific tissues and forward the samples to

the UC Davis Center for Vectorborne Diseases (CVEC) for WNV testing. Shipping and testing expenses will be paid by CDPH. Carcasses are considered **Category B, Biological Substances**. This replaces the old designation, "Diagnostic Specimen." To ensure the carcass arrives at CAHFS in a testable condition, to protect your safety, and to comply with shipping regulations, please follow these instructions:

1. Only dead birds and tree squirrels can be picked up under our permit.
2. Wear rubber or latex gloves when handling all carcasses. If gloves are not available, use a plastic bag -- turned inside out -- over your hand and invert the bag to surround the carcass. Do not touch a carcass with bare hands.
3. **Collect fresh carcasses.** Badly decomposed or scavenged carcasses are of limited diagnostic value. Signs that a bird or squirrel has been dead for too long (over 24-48 hours) are the presence of maggots, an extremely lightweight carcass, missing eyes, skin discoloration, skin or feathers that rub off easily, strong odor, or a soft, mushy carcass.
4. **If upon pick-up the carcass is found to be unacceptable (e.g. a species your agency or CDPH is not accepting or a badly decomposed specimen), please collect the carcass, double-bag it, and dispose of it in a secure garbage can or dumpster.** California Department of Fish & Wildlife prefers that you incinerate or bury the carcass, but disposing of it in a dumpster is also acceptable. You may want to check with your local regulations about proper disposal. **Please call the hotline at (510) 412-4601 immediately and notify us that the animal will no longer be submitted.**
5. Place each carcass into a sealed (zip lock) plastic bag. **This prevents cross-contamination and leakage. There should always be a bag separating the carcass from shipping documents.**
6. Enclose the shipping documents and the carcass (sealed in a zip lock bag), into a second zip lock bag. The primary shipping document is a copy of the dead bird submission form which contains the dead bird number and which is located on the Surveillance Gateway or faxed by CDPH. CAHFS prefers that you put this inside the outer bag containing the dead bird or squirrel.
7. Pack the carcass with blue ice packs. **Please limit the number of ice packs** to the number required to keep the carcass fresh, as the weight of extra ice packs add to the shipping charges. In accordance to shipping regulations, an absorbent material such as newspaper must be included in the box to prevent any leakage.
8. Ship the carcass in a styrofoam cooler placed in a cardboard box. Unprotected styrofoam containers cannot be shipped without an outer box or container, as they may break into pieces during shipment. **Contact GSO directly to arrange for carrier pickup Monday through Thursday; this guarantees arrival at CAHFS before the weekend.**
9. Contact **GSO** to pick up carcasses at **1-800-322-5555**. Our shipping account is **22971** and our zip code is **94804**.

10. Carcasses that need to be stored for an extended time period (over 2 days) should be put on dry ice or stored at -70°C. If it is not possible to store carcass at -70°C, a carcass may be stored at 0°C (regular freezer) for a short period of time. **Refrigerating** the carcass is recommended for **overnight storage only** (this slows virus deterioration, but does not stop it).
11. CDPH will provide prepared shipping boxes with appropriate labels. Any empty boxes shipped to you from CDPH will have its caution labels covered by sheets of paper with "EMPTY BOX" printed on them. Please discard this sheet of paper before using the box to ship out a dead bird. If you need additional boxes, please contact **Crystal Perreira at (510) 412-6251**.
12. Once agencies pass the yearly proficiency panel, agencies may conduct in-house testing. Results can be entered directly into the Surveillance Gateway. **Please enter results by 4:00pm Tuesday of each week to have results included in reports for that week's State WNV updates. Note: any positive bird must be disposed of as biomedical waste (incineration).**

Dead Bird Shipping List

Please verify that your agency has the following items:

- CAHFS Address (see below)
- GSO preprinted labels
- Agency-only number to speak with hotline operators (510-412-4601)
- WNV hotline number (877-968-2473; staffed 8am - 5pm, Monday-Friday)
- Crumpled newspapers or another absorbent material
- Rubber or Latex Gloves
- Packing tape
- Dead Bird Shipping Boxes
- inner zip-lock bag
- outer zip-lock bag
- inner styrofoam box
- outer cardboard box
- blue ice packs
- **California Animal Health & Food Safety (CAHFS) laboratories address:**

CAHFS Central (530) 754-7372
ATTN: WNV
Jacquelyn Parker
University of California, Davis
West Health Science Drive
Davis, CA 95616

If you have questions related to the CDPH WNV Dead Bird Surveillance Program, please contact Leslie Foss, WNV Dead Bird Program Coordinator, at 510-412-6255 or leslie.foss@cdph.ca.gov.